

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-11 LAB-06

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AGR-20 DODE-00 PA-04 USIA-15

PRS-01 SP-03 NIC-01 DRC-01 /090 W

----- 048712

R 180005Z SEP 74

FM AMCONSUL SYDNEY

TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5771

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PERTH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 1990

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, AS

SUBJ: ANTI-LABOR RURAL ACTION GROUP

1. AS REPORTED IN PRESS, THERE WAS A RALLY OF SOME 4,000 NEW SOUTH WALES AND QUEENSLAND FARMERS IN MOREE, NORTHERN NEW SOUTH WALES, WHICH ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, LISTENED TO SPEECHES CONDEMNING AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR BIAS AGAINST COUNTRY DISTRICTS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, SPEAKERS DEMANDED RENOGOTIATION OF WHEAT STABILIZATION PROGRAM, RE-INTRODUCTION OF SUPERPHOSPHATE BOUNTIES, AND RELIEF FROM ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION ON TELEPHONE RATES AND FREIGHT DIFFERENTIALS, ETC. RALLY WAS ADDRESSED BY MICHAEL DARBY, RECENTLY RESIGNED ARMY CAPTAIN WHO STOOD FOR WHITLAM'S SEAT IN MAY FEDERAL ELECTION. DARBY IS BECOMING WELL KNOWN AS CONSERVATIVE CRUSADER AND LAST WEEK ADDRESSED A MEETING IN SYDNEY TOWN HALL CALLING FOR SECRET VOTING IN TRADE UNION DISPUTES. THE RALLY AT MOREE WAS CONDUCTED IN THE NAME OF "NATIONAL ACTION GROUP" WHICH SOME LABOR SOURCES HAVE SUGGESTED IS THE BEGINNING OF A RIGHT WING VIGILANTE MOVEMENT, WHICH IS DENIED BY DARBY WHO SPOKE AGAINST VIGILANTISM AT MOREE. VARIOUS SOURCES INDICATE THE MEETING AT MOREE MAY BE ONLY THE FIRST OF A NUMBER REFLECTING A

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SWELL OF ANTI-FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FEELING IN COUNTRY

DISTRICTS.

2. RESPONSIBLE LEADERS OF THE NSW L/CP GOVERNMENT DISCLAIM ANY ASSOCIATION WITH NATIONAL ACTION GROUP AND DEPUTY PREMIER AND STATE COUNTRY PARTY LEADER, SIR CHARLES CUTLER, HAS INDIRECTLY CRITICIZED THE GROUP FOR REPORTED THREATS TO CONDUCT A COUNTRY BOYCOTT OF CITY MARKETS IN PROTEST AGAINST WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. WHILE CUTLER WENT ON TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THE FARMERS GRIEVANCES, HE CAME DOWN FIRMLY ON THE SIDE OF SEEKING REDRESS THROUGH THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM BY TRADITIONAL MEANS OF LAW AND ORDER. HE ADDED THAT THE SYSTEM "HAS BEEN SARELY TESTED BY ANARCHISTS AND EXTREME LEFT UNIONISTS IN OUR SOCIETY."

3. LIBERAL PARTY MEMBERS OF NSW PARLIAMENT, BARRACLOUGH AND MASON, BOTH EXPRESS SKEPTICISM REGARDING NATIONAL ACTION GROUP AND OTHER SIMILAR TYPES OF MOVEMENT, ARGUING THAT THE PROPER RECOURSE IS THROUGH REGULAR POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY, BUT BOTH ALSO EXPRESS SYMPATHY FOR GREVANCES FELT BY RURAL PEOPLE POINTING OUT THAT WHILE IT IS ACCEPTED THAT UNIONISTS CAN GO ON STRIKE AND STOP PETROL SUPPLIES TO THE PUBLIC, YET A COMPARABLE THREAT OF A FARMER'S STRIKE IS DENOUNCED AS RIGHT WING EXTREMISM. FORMER SOLICITOR GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA, ELLICOTT, NOW LIBERAL FEDERAL M.P. FROM SYDNEY, OBSERVED MOREE RALLY WITHOUT BEING RECOGNIZED HIMSELF, AND JUDGED THAT IT WAS RESPONSIBLY WELL RUN ALTHOUGH ELLICOTT, LIKE THE OTHERS, IS SKEPTICAL OF DARBY. MASON SAYS THERE WILL BE MORE SUCH MEETINGS AND ONE HAS ALREADY OCCURRED IN HIS CONSTITUENCY OF DUBBO TO WHICH HE WAS INVITED BUT DID NOT ATTEND.

4. COUNTRY PARTY M.P. LEON PUNCH, NSW MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, REFLECTS SIMILAR WARINESS OF BOTH THE DIRECTION OF SUCH RALLIES AND OF DARBY, BUT SYMPATHY, FOR LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES OF RURAL PEOPLE. FOR TIME BEING, SAID PUNCH, THESE RURAL RALLIES PRESENT NO THREAT OF COMPETITION TO THE COUNTRY PARTY ALTHOUGH THEY DEPEND MAINLY ON THE COUNTRY PARTY'S CONSTITUENCY FOR SUPPORT. COUNTRY PARTY LEADERSHIP HOPES TO REDIRECT LEGITIMATE RURAL POLITICAL ENERGIES THROUGH RESPONSIBLE TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION AND UNITED FARMERS AND WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION RATHER THAN NOISY MASS MEETINGS OF THE MOREE TYPE. PUNCH RECOGNIZED THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF EXTREME RIGHT WING EXPLOITATION AND MENTIONED ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS LEAGUE OF RIGHTS AND THE SOCIETY FOR FREE AUSTRALIA.

5. COMMENT: WHILE THESE MANIFESTATIONS ARE STILL IN AN INCIPIENT STAGE AND MAY NOT REPEAT NOT BECOME SERIOUS,

THEY DO REFLECT AN INTENSIFICATION OF RURAL ANTIPATHY WHICH COULD, UNDER PROGRESSIVELY DETERIORATING CIRCUMSTANCES, BE LINKED UP WITH OTHER CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS AND PERHAPS BE EXPLOITED BY A NEW EXTREME RIGHT WINGERS. LABOR INTIMATIONS OF BURGEONING VIGILANTISM APPEAR TO BE GREATLY OVER-STATED. NEVERTHELESS, THESE EVENTS DO REFLECT AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE TROUBLES FACING THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, PRESS COMMENTS, WHEAT, AGRICULTURAL WORKERS, SPEECHES, RURAL AREAS, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 SEP 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: cunninfx
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974SYDNEY01990
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740260-1101
From: SYDNEY
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740934/aaaabchc.tel
Line Count: 123
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <07 MAR 2003 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ANTI-LABOR RURAL ACTION GROUP
TAGS: PINS, PINT, AS, (DARBY, MICHAEL)
To: CANBERRA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005